

National Education Report Austria 2021

Executive Summary



Legal information

Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)
Minoritenplatz 5, 1010 Vienna
bmbwf.gv.at

National Education Report Austria 2021. Executive Summary
Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (ed.)
Vienna, 2021

Layout, typesetting and editing:
Department 2/4, Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System (IQS)

Photo credits: stock.adobe.com – connel_design (Cover)

Contents

Introduction	3
Part 1 – Education Controlling Report	5
Part 2 – Education Indicators	10
Part 3 – Selected Areas for Development	13

Introduction

The National Education Report 2021 is published every three years and is now available for the fifth time. For the first time, the National Education Report (NBB) is coordinated, published and submitted to the National Council by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) on the basis of Section 5 para. 3 of the Board of Education Act (BD-EG). The NBB 2021 was compiled in collaboration with the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance of the Austrian School System (IQS) and external researchers.

The National Education Report 2021 is divided into three parts. The first part, the Education Controlling Report, was written by BMBWF staff with editorial collaboration from the IQS and contains a description of the management of the Austrian school system, a description of the components of education controlling and their implementation status, as well as results from the education controlling and the school quality reports of the Boards of Education. The Education Controlling Report thus represents an overview of the results of impact-orientated management, quality management, resource controlling and education monitoring.

The second part, on education indicators, was written by IQS staff members with support from the IHS and offers a comprehensive and differentiated quantitative representation of important aspects of the school and education system. The statistical analyses provide an overview on developments and the status quo of the Austrian education system in its social environment. This part of the report does not claim to be an evaluation, but rather provides a data-based foundation of information.

The third part deals with selected areas for development and was written by external researchers and IQS staff members with expertise in the respective subject areas. The four thematic contributions represent challenges relevant to education policy in view of the current state of research and highlight the resulting research desiderata. External experts have made a significant contribution to the quality assurance of the scientific contributions through their review.

The present Executive Summary offers an overview on the content of the National Education Report 2021 and is structured in accordance with the three parts of the main report. Detailed information can be found in the main report, and information on Part 2 also in the additional online data material on the websites of the BMBWF and the IQS.

Part 1 – Education Controlling Report

Introduction

Starting in 2021, and in accordance with Section 5 of the BD-EG, the BMBWF must submit an Education Controlling Report to the National Council as part of the National Education Report.

Education controlling serves to ensure the quality fulfilment of the duty of the Austrian school (pursuant to Section 2 of the School Organisation Act [SchOG] 1962) and the impact-orientated, efficient and transparent use of resources on all levels of school administration and schools. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) establishes the exact framework conditions for education controlling through regulation.

The present report provides an overview on:

- The management of the Austrian school system
- The components of education controlling
- The results of the education controlling and the school quality reports

Introduction of a new management system in the Austrian school system

The management of the Austrian school system was newly defined by the Education Reform Act of 2017. The expanded autonomy of all schools in the areas of lesson organisation, staff selection and staff development and the introduction of education regions as a management level make it easier to adapt the educational offer to regional needs. Uniform goals and control are made possible by the merging of the administration of federal and state teachers, the new regional structure of school supervision across all types of schools with increased focus on the educational progress and educational careers of the pupils, and the introduction of educational monitoring and external school evaluation.

Responsibilities and components of education controlling in Austria

Education controlling is the prerequisite for strategic planning, management and further development of the education system. The focus in education controlling is on goal-orientated, systematic and quality-assured impact on schools and school administration

through the interaction between education monitoring, quality management and resource controlling. Education controlling is composed of the following components, which are presented in detail in the report and in summary below:

- **Quality framework:**

The Quality Framework for Schools (QR) describes the characteristics of school quality and forms the binding, content-related basis of the Quality Management System for Schools (QMS). It came into effect in January 2021.

- **Education monitoring:**

Education monitoring is the continual and systematic observation of the education system through the use of data. The aim is to improve the processes and results of the school system by providing needs-based feedback (e.g. in the form of reports) as well as generating new knowledge by conducting analyses.

- **Standardised assessment of competences:**

From the 2021/22 school year, education standards will be reviewed annually with the instrument for assessing core competences (German: individuelle Kompetenzmessung PLUS, iKM^{PLUS}). The education standards established by regulation since 2009 will remain unchanged, while the form of assessing them will be further developed and strengthened in its functions.

- **Internal school evaluation:**

Internal school evaluation is an evaluation conducted by persons or groups responsible for the work processes and results in the school, thus primarily by the principal and educators.

- **External school evaluation:**

External school evaluation gives a school objective feedback, based on quality indicators and empirical processes, on the quality of the processes and teaching at the school. The evaluation report highlights development perspectives for a school and must be incorporated in continual quality development.

- **Resource controlling:**

Resource controlling is the review of the deployment of staff and financial resources.

- **Planning and reporting:**

Planning and reporting refers to the reports that have to be compiled on the different levels (school, education region, Board of Education, BMBWF).

The components of education controlling are in different stages of implementation. Because of this, an overview of the results of the education controlling instruments that are already active is provided in the Education Controlling Report 2021 and in the school quality reports of the Boards of Education. Impact information from the BMBWF and its evaluation in 2020 as well as the 2020 resource, goal and performance plans (German: Ressourcen-, Ziel- und Leistungspläne [RZL-Pläne]) of the Boards of Education form the basis of the overview.

Results of the evaluation of the impact information of the BMBWF 2020

The evaluation of the impact information for 2020 of the BMBWF was positive. The three impact goals “Increasing the performance and educational level of pupils and of target groups in adult education”, “Improvement of the needs orientation of as well as equal opportunities and gender equality in the education system” and “Increasing efficacy and efficiency in school organisation and education administration” were mostly achieved. The fourth impact goal, “Improving education and career opportunities by advancing language competence”, was partially achieved. In general, it can be stated that the trend in the level of education observed until now will continue. The general trend towards a higher level of school education is still evident. The learning backlogs created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible amplification of the unjust distribution of education this may have caused are countered by targeted measures, like the offer of remedial lessons and the establishment of a summer school. The impact goals mentioned will be continued in 2021.

Selected goals and actions from the Resource, Goal and Performance plans (RZL plans) of the Boards of Education

The selected goals from the resource, goal and performance plans (RZL plans) of the Boards of Education - “Improving the Management and Reorganisation of School Administration” (Goal 1); “Quality Management” (Goal 2) and “Strengthening of (basic) competences and cultural techniques with special focus on language competence in the language of learning German of children in elementary learning institutions and at school” (Goal 3) and the measures and milestones envisaged for this were evaluated. In the process it became clear that the largest part of the milestones for the measure “Anchoring of the education region as management unit incl. realignment of school supervision” of Goal 1 was achieved at least partially, and in many cases completely. A central focus of the measures was the development of expertise across school types of

the school quality managers (SQM) in the education regions and among specialist staff, as well as the reorganisation of duties and supervisory fields. The measure “Anchoring of the education region as management unit incl. realignment of school supervision” will remain in the RZL plan for 2021.

In the field of school quality, the implementation of the measure “Fulfilment of management tasks in quality management” is considered in more detail. It showed that the focus of the formulated milestones was on the milestone and target-setting meeting discussions. Organising and holding the talks, developing, evaluating and adapting standardised discussion threads as well as the control of the agreements reached in the talks were essential aspects of the implementation. In a few cases, there were delays or milestones that could not (yet) be reached because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the main emphasis will be on the gradual implementation of quality management for all schools, and the focus will lie on the measures “Implementation and communication of the quality framework and the new QMS” and “Support for schools in the implementation and communication of the quality framework and the new QMS”.

The goal “Strengthening of (basic) competences and cultural techniques with special emphasis on language competence in the language of learning German of children in elementary education institutions and at school” was pursued in 2020 i.a. with the measure “Advancement of language competence in the language of teaching and learning German”. The emphasis here was on the development of additional expertise and/or the assessment of existing expertise in the field of language (assessment of graduates with additional training in “German as second language”), and according to the reports from the Boards of Education this was also achieved. Unfortunately no success was achieved with the measure “Diagnostic instruments and implementation for safeguarding the basic competence of reading”, as not all pupils in the primary level and lower secondary level were able to participate in the competence measurement in German because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The measure “Information transfer on language advancement between kindergarten and primary school” could be implemented successfully by means of planned transfer of data between kindergartens and schools in order to ensure a better transition between the two institutions. The measures implemented in this field will be continued in 2021.

School quality reports of the Boards of Education

An important part of the Education Controlling Report are the school quality reports of the Boards of Education (Section 5 para. 3 BD-EG). They contain personnel and resource data as well as quality assurance results for each Board of Education (Section 30 para. 2 BD-EG).

Current data about financial and staffing resources from the Boards of Education indicate high stability in two years under review (2019, 2020). This applies to the area of school management as well as to the resources which are made available for schools (e.g. teaching and administrative staff). The development of the resources is consistent with the minor changes in number of pupils, as shown in Indicator B2.2 in Part 2 “Education indicators”. Information and data on school quality in the federal states are provided by some more of the statistical analyses in Part 2, “Education Indicators”.

Outlook

As education controlling is still being developed, the Education Controlling Report 2021 is still a “transitional report”. It provides insight into the new management of the education system, as well as into the components of education controlling and presents the first controlling results. In the Education Controlling Report 2024, significantly bigger focus will be placed on the results which have been achieved with the help of the education controlling instruments. From 2024 onwards, the school quality reports of the Boards of Education will also, apart from data on staffing and resources, provide the results of quality assurance by means of chosen indicators. The Quality Framework for Schools, which describes the characteristics of school quality, forms the substantive basis for the development of these indicators. Preparation of the data for the school quality reports is done via education monitoring.

Part 2 – Education Indicators

From the 56 education indicators with almost 140 figures, the following aspects stand out.

Challenges as a result of demographic developments

According to the population forecast from Statistics Austria, the number of six- to 14-year-olds in Austria will increase by 5% in the next ten years (Indicator A1.1). This has to be seen in light of the fact that almost a quarter of teaching staff in primary schools and almost a third of teaching staff in middle schools are 55 years and older, and will therefore go into retirement during the same time period (Indicator B3.1). Sufficient recruiting of new teaching staff thus remains a significant challenge in order to combat the scenario of a shortage of teachers.

As in the resident population (Indicator A1.2), the proportion of children with a migration background, and those who do not use German as their everyday language, has increased significantly over the last few years in primary level (Indicator A2.2). Often with a migration background – depending on the specific origin of the family – lower education levels of the parents and lower occupational status go hand in hand (Indicator A2.1). In total, this presents a cumulation of risks for the learning success of these groups (Indicator A2.3), as can be seen during the school career (Indicator C2.1) and reaching graduation (Indicator D1.1), as well as the gaining of competences (Indicator group D3).

Both in the general demographic development as well as from the perspective of the change in social composition, the most urban municipalities (one of them being Vienna) take up a special place, as it is evident from several context indicators (especially A2.3). In addition, it results in a concentration of certain social conditions in some schools and classes, as shown in indicator group B6. The different framework conditions in which schools are supposed to render a service, suggest concepts of locational promotion and support.

The level of education expenditure is a question of perspective

With regard to the often cited indicator of education expenditure per pupil, the Austrian education system is often seen as particularly expenditure-intensive (“expensive”) in the European context, see (Indicator B1.2). With the different school types, the high per capita cost for the (new) middle schools compared to the academic secondary school

(AHS lower cycle) is especially striking, (Indicator B1.1), which to a large extent can be explained because of the lower pupil number per class in the (new) middle schools (Indicator B5.2), of which more and more are now also found in smaller municipalities (Indicator B4.1). With primary schools, the per capita spend should be seen against the background of Austria maintaining small elementary schools with fewer than four classes, sometimes also in urban or regional centres as well as in the close vicinity of these centres (Indicator B4.2).

However, if the total expenditure on education is considered in relation to GDP - which is a very common indicator of prosperity - Austria does not take up a special position compared to the rest of Europe and the relationship between the two variables has not changed significantly over the past few years (Indicator A1.3). Public spending on education, compared with other European countries, actually takes up a small part in comparison to private financing of schools and higher education institutions (Indicator B1.3).

Positive developments in performance with continuing social selectivity

In the subjects mathematics (4th grade) and English (8th grade) in which the educational standards were assessed anew in 2018 and 2019, clear improvements in the level of competence (Indicators D2.1 and D2.3) were evident. In the domain mathematics in TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) 2019, Austrian pupils from the 4th grade performed exceptionally well compared to their international counterparts (Indicator D2.2). Together with these, there were average results in comparison with OECD and EU countries in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2018 (Indicator D2.4).

However, there continues to be a connection between family background and learning success (indicator group D3), which is also high when viewed in an international comparison. Factors like the highest (formal) education level of the parents and not using German as first language - amongst other comparable conditions - are especially predictive for the acquisition of competencies. In addition, in Indicator C2.2, renewed secondary effects relating to origin could be shown during the course of education, namely that pupils from different social backgrounds pursue higher formal educational pathways to varying degrees, even with comparable levels of competence.

Newer developments in the areas of “digital infrastructure” and “afterschool programmes”

In two areas that have received particular political attention in recent years, more short-term developments are also visible:

Equipping schools with IT infrastructure is gaining momentum (Indicator B4.4): with the exception of primary schools, more than half of all schools had WLAN available in all their teaching and recreational spaces in 2020. In 2016, the proportions were still 16.8 to 22.0 percentage points lower, depending on the type of school. Access to the internet for pupils - even if it is restricted in order to protect children and youths - is seen as a given in federal schools, and this trend can also be seen in middle schools (84% in 2020) and in primary schools (74% in the year 2020).

During the school year 2019/20, 23.7% pupils up to the 8th grade attended after-school programmes at least once a week (Indicator C3.1). This represents an increase of 1.8 percentage points in only two school years, and in Vienna the proportion of learners attending afterschool programmes at least once a week is now close to 40%. The majority of all-day schools remain open for their pupils until at least 17:00.

Part 3 – Selected Areas for Development

In Part 3 of the NBB 2021, four selected fields of development are presented from a research perspective. The contributions present challenges relevant to education policy in connection with the current state of research, political measures taken so far and resulting relevant research desiderata. Following the contributions of the authors, the National Education Report briefly presents the BMBWF's position on each topic.

Distance learning 2020 – framework conditions, risks and opportunities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation saw huge growth in the area of education. As face-to-face learning had to be halted temporarily, teaching in part occurred via distance learning. This new situation brought about huge challenges for those who participate in the schooling system, but also brought new teaching and learning experiences. In their contributions the authors *Fares Kayali, Gerhard Brandhofer, Martin Ebner, Naemi Luckner, Sandra Schön* and *Christine Trültzsch-Wijnen* discuss concepts around the topic of distance learning and describe various forms of digital teaching and learning. Conditions for success and recommendations for action for a sustainable anchoring of ICT-supported teaching and learning are derived from existing studies and findings. The effects of the developments triggered by the pandemic in the school sector and the effectiveness of the measures taken should still be examined in detail by means of accompanying scientific research.

School development counselling and school development counselling research

The development of school development counselling in Austria as well as similar support services for school development in other countries are described and results and concepts of the German and English literature are summarised in the contribution of the authors *Herbert Altrichter, Ulrich Krainz, David Kemethofer, Livia Jesacher-Röbber, Hannes Hautz* and *Stefan Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz*. For further research on school development counselling, it is recommended that a descriptive presentation of the landscape of school development counselling in Austria (what is currently on offer, supplementary support services and their utilisation) should be developed and a survey of schools' support should be conducted. Conceptual models and studies on the modes of action and processes of school development counselling and accompanying research on reform initiatives are further recommendations for research on school development counselling.

Quality development in the Austrian schooling system – competence orientation and its implementation as guiding concept

In the contribution from *Andrea Kulmhofer-Bommer* and *Natascha Diekmann* different aspects regarding the connection between competence, the acquisition of competence, the measuring of competence as well as competence-oriented teaching are presented. Thereafter the authors discuss educational policy measures (e.g., educational standards, standardised competence-oriented Reifeprüfung and diploma examinations and quality management systems for schools) which were applied in Austria in this field. Informative findings could be gained in this field by researching the knowledge and approach of teaching staff regarding competence orientation as well as the examination of various characteristics of instruction (e.g., cognitive activation during teaching). Apart from that, the effect of educational policy measures in the field of competence orientation should be researched further.

Reading competence and teaching of reading instruction in Austria – findings, developments and research interests from the subject didactical and educational policy perspective

In the fourth and last contribution, the authors *Antonia Bachinger*, *Michael Bruneforth* and *Juliane Schmich* cover reading competence and teaching of reading instruction in Austria. They first investigate various models of reading from the perspective of subject didactics and then, on the basis of the findings of national and international surveys, show the competence of Austrian pupils in the area of reading. Development concepts, especially those regarding fundamental reading skills, are summarised. Apart from the measures to be taken for diagnostics as well as the structure of teaching, approaches to the training and continuing education of teachers are presented, which assist with the further advancement of reading development. The authors recommend that better knowledge of current reading instruction and reading development as well as about further training needs should be gained. Surveys about the competences, knowledge and convictions of teaching staff regarding reading instruction and promotion are also needed.

